7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

796 place during the year in the towns and villages on the day of the festival, held in honour of the titular or some other Saint, there are also other processions, such as that of Good Friday and St. Gregory's day, the origin and description of which will be given in another place.

Having thus glanced briefly at some local recreations of the Maltese which have connection with their religious ceremonies in celebrating the annual festivals in honour of the celestial patron of the town or village, we now come to the other usages and customs, which are observed by the Maltese during the year commencing from that of

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

529 •431 Early on the morning of the 1st. of January, groups of children may be

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

seen perambulating the streets, throughout the towns and villages, each with a small oval-shaped wooden box in hand. 527 431

Every child you meet, in wishing you "Is-sena it-tajba" (a Happy New Year) implores the yearly mite, and this he does by shaking his cash, which no doubt consists of some few farthings or halfpennies, whose dulcet jingle, however, fills his little soul with joy.

The practice of giving "l' Istrina" (a small money gift) to these children, to domestic servants and to persons in an inferior position on New Year's Day is a recognised custom in this Island.

This making of presents on the first day of the year is no doubt of great antiquity, and innocent as is now the custom of giving money gifts to the children and servants on New Year's 527 431 171

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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Day, it was in ancient times done by the heathen Romans as a form of homage to the two-faced *Janus*, the God of the year, especially honoured in that capacity in the first month (January), and the giving of "strina" in January was vehemently denounced by the early council of Auxerre, as an act of Pagan worship.

In the *Monthly Miscellany* for December 1592 there is an essay on New Year's gifts, which state that the Romans were great observers of the custom, even when their year began in March and consisted of 10 months of 36 days each, and also when January and February were added by Numa(*) to the other ten, the calends, or first of

(*) NUMA—a celebrated philosopher born at Cures, a village of the Sabines, on the day that Romulus laid the foundation of Rome.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

January, was the time on which they made presents,and even Romulus (1)and Tatius (2) decreed that every year *vervine* (3) should be brought as an offering to them with other gifts, as a token of good fortune for the New Year. 527 431 171

Tacitus (4) makes mention of an order of Tiberius (5) forbidding the giving or demanding of New Year's gifts unless it was in the calends of January, at

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(1) Romulus—the founder of Rome was the son of Mars, he was ranked by the Romans among the 12 great gods, being the founder of their city and Empire, and the son of the god of war.

(2) Tatius—king of Cures among the Sabines, made war against the Romans after the rape of the Sabines. He was murdered at Lanuvium B.C. 792.

(3) *Vervine*—a plant which has been connected with some of the superstitious rites of the Greeks & Romans.

(4) Tacitus—a celebrated historian born in the reign of Nero and was destroyed by the secret dagger of an assassin on the 13th of April in the 276th year of the Christian era.

(5)Tiberius—a Roman Emperor after the death of Augustus.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

527 which time the Senators, as well as the
•431 knights and other great men, brought
191 gifts to the Emperor, and in his absence to the Capitol (1).

527 It is also the custom in some places
799 of Malta for men to go about strewing some lime in the door-ways on New Year's day. Some idea of good luck may perhaps be associated with the lime; there is no tradition, however, as far as is known, whence this custom arose.

527 New Year's greetings in the shape
203 of visiting cards, are very profusely exchanged on this occasion, especially among the better classes.

527 Groups of street musicians go from
431 house to house, either on the last day
533 of the old year or on the morning of

(1) Capitol, the temple of Jupiter at Rome built on the top of a hill.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

the 1st of January playing popular pieces of music, and this they do as a New Year's greeting. These men will rarely leave a house until some little gift of money is bestowed upon them as a remuneration for their trouble in paying their annual congratulations.

ST. ANTHONY'S DAY.

Among the popular Maltese customs in which animals play a leading part, that of the blessing of the quadrupeds of the equine species, in Valletta, on St. Anthony's day, is the most familiar.

On the morning of the 17th January (St. Anthony's day) a number of horses, mules, and donkeys, decked out in ribbons and tassels, are driven in procession in front of the Vittoria, a little

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

CANDLEMAS DAY

This is a religious festival observed not only in Malta but in all other Catholic countries in honour of the Blessed Virgin on the 2nd of February, the 40th day after the Nativity of our Lord.

The word Candlemas is evidently derived from the benediction of the candles, followed by a procession, which takes place in the churches on the morning of this day.

Nearly every family in the Island is presented with one or two of these blessed candles—each having at the lower end, the image of the Blessed Virgin stamped in gold leaf, as a distinction from other ordinary wax candles.

These they receive either from the priests, or from some other person attached to the church, as a sort of a slight recompense, for the contributions

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

offered during the year, for the purpose either of decorating or repairing the church or churches of the parish to which they belong.

It is also customary for every parish priest—on this special day, or on the day following—to present both the Bishop and the Governor of the Island with a two lb. candle. It is to be observed, however, that the candle given to the Governor is only a blessed one when he happens to profess the Roman Catholic Religion.

This giving of candles to both the Bishop and the Governor—a continuation of a custom that prevailed in the time of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, when the Grand Master was annually presented with a blessed candle on this day—is meant as a token of respect to each of the highest Ecclesiastical and Civil dignitaries of the Island.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

796 times at different parts of the town; the best run, however, which is mostly enjoyed, both by the spectators and the carriers of the statue, is that which takes place at the lower end of Strada Reale on the hill opposite St. Catherine's Church and Convent.

Here large crowds of men are seen ready to help the bearers in the run with the heavy statue up the hill.

After traversing several other streets, the image is deposited in the same church from which it started.

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EASTER EGGS &c.

The custom of eating and presenting *figolli* and round cheese cakes *(kassatat)* is as prevalent in Malta, at Easter, as it is in any other town or country of Italy.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Maltese children look forward with great anxiety to get either from their parents, or from some friend or relative, a *figolla* at Easter. 796 262 431.

The *figolla* consists of a bit of flat baked dough, cut in the shape of a woman, a turk, an eagle, a horse, a star, or a basket, with one or more eggs, having the shell stained red, or some other colour, embedded in its centre and fixed in position by cross bands of paste.

This characteristic rite of Paschal or Easter eggs is most widely diffused. 796 262

The universal connection of eggs with Eastertide does not seem to rest on any Christian symbolism. This popular observance is clearly of pagan origin. 171 174

In pagan imagery the egg was assigned to *Astarte*—the Phœnician Venus—as an emblem of the fructifying

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

584 ness of the connection, without at all consulting the inclinations of their children.

[675] The articles of the contract having [431] been settled, and the marriage portion [583] agreed upon, the young man sent his intended bride a present consisting of a certain fish ornamented with garlands of ribband, with a ring or some costly jewel in its mouth.

The first interview was then fixed to take place in presence of the parents and their kinsfolk, best friends, and neighbours, who were regaled with sweetmeats and other refreshments.

[989] Before this meeting took place, the mothers of the two young people retired either into an arbour in the garden or some separate apartment, where they prepared a mixture of aniseed, aromatic plants, salt, and honey

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

585 The bridal procession then proceeded to the Church for the ceremony, attended by musicians playing on different instruments, and singers who sang stanzas in praise of the young couple. These musicians were proceeded by three men: the first bearing on his head a basin of white earth on which was placed a big cake with two figures, representing the bridegroom and the bride—the man who carried this basin wore also a scarf with a round cake hanging from it. The second [262] carried a basket filled with sugar plums [431] and candied nuts, which one of the relations distributed among such acquaintances he happened to meet. In the middle of the basket was a handkerchief folded in the form of a pyramid, and ornamented with the images of the B. Virgin, St. Joseph, and the

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

585 ered flowers upon them, also nuts and grains of wheat, and on their entering the house one of the kinsfolk threw from one of the windows or balcony a few handfuls of barley and some small coins on their heads.

The nuptial feast took place immediately afterwards; but the bride ate in a separate apartment. The repast being ended she was seated next to her husband and drank out of the same cup.

[184] [535] [465] [431] At a village wedding the company danced during the feast; each dancer throwing a piece of money to the fiddlers and each guest contributing a fowl to the repast.

[591] The bride always passed a week in her father's house, after which she was received with much pomp by her husband whose relations gave a great feast which was called il *hargia*.

7: Busuttil -I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

764 their faces and black silk cloaks. (*)
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[292] The room being stripped of all its furniture and hung with black cloth.

[302] The *neuuieha*, throwing themselves on their knees at the foot of the coffin, began singing the praises of the dead, and cut off handfuls of their hair which
[262] they spread over the coffin. On the same
[431] day, cakes and boiled wheat were distributed among all the relations, and the hair was cut off the tails of every horse at the stables belonging to the house of the deceased.

764 The funeral procession was always
533 composed of the relations in mourning preceded by some boys playing the fifes or trumpets.

[765] (*) The colours of the dress or habit. worn to signify
[822] grief are different in different countries. In Europe,
[171] the ordinary colour for mourning is black. *Black*, being the privation of light, is supposed to denote the privation of life.

PULLEYN *Origin & Inventions.*

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

584 her arrival, who presented her with a ring on which
[301] was engraved two hands united—the emblem of mutual faith—together with bracelets, necklaces, and a gold chain—she presenting him in return with a handkerchief trimmed with lace and bows of ribbon.

This ceremony is called *il chelma*, which means the engagement.

585 On the morning of the wedding day the most honoured
[292] personage among the husband's relations threw a fine white veil over the bride's head—who wore a brocade
[301] or velvet dress, in which the other relations made certain rents for the purpose of affixing small golden shells.

[533] The bridal procession then proceeded to the Church for the ceremony, attended by musicians playing on different instruments, and singers who sang stanzas in praise of the young couple. These musicians were preceded by three men, the first bearing on his head a basin of white earth on which was placed a big cake with two figures representing the bridegroom and the bride—the
[431] man who carried this basin wore also a scarf with a round cake hanging from it. The second carried a basket filled with sugar plums and candied nuts, which one of the relations distributed among such acquaintances he hap-
[532] pened to meet. In the middle of the basket was a handkerchief folded in the form of a pyramid and ornamented with the images of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the Infant Jesus. The third man was constantly employed in burning perfumes. The bride and bridegroom followed, walking under a canopy of crimson velvet carried by four of the principal persons who attended the wedding. The rest of the relations and invited friends, called the *Haddara*, closed the procession.

[202] The arrival of the bridal procession at the church was announced by the ringing of bells. The officiating

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

The officiating priest was then presented with a basin containing a cake, a handkerchief, and two bottles of wine—the usual fee on such occasions. When the marriage ceremony was completed, everyone returned from church in the same order as before.

As the newly married couple wended their way to their house, the women and girls who crowded the balconies showered flowers upon them also nuts and grains and wheat, and on their entering the house one of the kinsfolk threw from one of the windows or balcony a few handfuls of barley and some small coins on their heads.

The nuptial feast took place immediately afterwards; but the bride ate in a separate apartment. The repast being ended, she was seated next to her husband and drank out of the same cup.

At a village wedding the company danced during the feast, each dancer throwing a piece of money to the fiddlers and each guest contributing a fowl to the repast.

The bride always passed a week in her father's house, after which she was received with much pomp by her husband, whose relations gave a great feast which was called *il hargia*."[1]

The bridegroom's symbolic present of a fish is very likely connected with fecundity, for the fish was regarded as an emblem of fecundity by the Assyrians and the Phoenicians. It is not, however, in this connection alone that the fish is a potent symbol. Prudence (apparently a virtue highly prized in a Maltese wife—Salt, another symbol of prudence, is included in the ingredients with which the bride's lips are anointed), and Wisdom were anciently supposed to be the properties of numerous Sacred Fish. Finn M'Cull, in the Irish legend, "Happens upon the Salmon of Knowledge . . ."

[1] BUSUTTIL, op. cit.